

Testimony by Laura Koziarski
In Support of H.B. 4674

Thank you, Senate Health Policy Committee members, for allowing me to testify in support of H.B. 4674. I appreciate the opportunity to share my family's experience with mental illness and treatment in the state of Michigan.

My name is Laura Koziarski. I am a resident of Calhoun County and the mother of three children. My oldest son, Travis, began having personality changes in his late teens. He engaged in risky behaviors and began abusing alcohol and drugs. No amount of tough love had an effect. My husband and I were helpless in changing his behavior. When he decided to enlist in the army, there was a sense of relief. Maybe the military could straighten him out.

During his 3 years in the army, he received treatment for substance abuse and bipolar disorder. He went AWOL, wrecked his car, received a head injury while intoxicated and fighting, and was given an "other than Honorable discharge" after testing positive for marijuana. His discharge designation left him without treatment or military benefits.

Travis showed up at my door addicted, delusional, and hallucinating. Inpatient treatment in a psychiatric hospital followed, but he went off of his meds as soon as he was released. That was 5 years ago. Since then, he has incurred:

- an aggravated assault with a deadly weapons charge;
- a DUI with possession of a weapon while intoxicated;
- over a year in veteran's treatment court;
- three months in the county jail; and
- two court ordered inpatient hospitalizations.

During Travis' manic episodes, he obsesses on his military training and fantasizes about fighting in the war of good vs evil that is being waged all *around us*. He makes weapons out of knives and screw drivers, and he stockpiles guns in preparation for the battle.

I have been in the emergency room with him more than once, after he has threatened to kill himself or told me he fantasizes about killing all day. When they ask him the question: "do you ever think of hurting yourself or others?" he immediately denies it. He learned after his first hospitalization what to say...and what not to say. He's mentally ill, but he's no dummy.

Travis' last episode occurred in March of this year. He had been off of his medication since he was released from jail last September. He started having manic episodes. He was fired from his job delivering pizzas, and evicted from his apartment. He was obsessing over killing coyotes and built a fort out in the woods, where he went to live. He would take pictures of himself hanging from a tree 50 feet in the air.

He brought a weapon to my house that he made out of screw drivers and knives. He called it his killing mitt. He lined up several guns on my living room floor. It was obvious that my son was once again losing touch with reality, but I still could not convince him he needed treatment.

We requested that our son be picked up for a mental evaluation. That's always a scary proposition, because he is usually discharged and then his anger is targeted towards his family. This time was no different, until a police officer stepped forward and started asking him targeted questions. Travis' illness came through and he was immediately transferred to inpatient treatment in Detroit, as the local psychiatric hospital felt he needed more services than they could provide.

My son has since been discharged and is on Lithium for his bipolar disorder. His symptoms are under control, for the moment. He is finally admitting that he has an illness and needs medication. A major breakthrough. Unfortunately, his life is in shambles. Most of the people in his life have abandoned him, out of fear or mistrust. It's hard for them to forget the person Travis becomes when his illness takes over.

I can't help but wonder what would have happened if Travis would have been ordered to continue on his medication when he was released from jail last September.

The state wouldn't have incurred the cost of inpatient treatment. Maybe he'd still have a job and wouldn't be homeless. Maybe he wouldn't be struggling to pick up the pieces of his life once again.

In closing, I think it's important to emphasize that mental illness affects brain function. As the law currently stands, people with limited mental function are expected to be proactive in treating their illness. It's just not always possible. Sometimes they need a little assistance. House Bill 4674 will do just that.

Thank you for allowing me to share our story.



